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SENIOR POLITICIAN KILLED IN LEBANON CAR BOMBING

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Aruba TODAY

On Top Of The News Email: news@arubatoday.com website: www.arubatoday.com Tel: +297 582-7800 Saturday, December 28, 2013



Different strains of pot are displayed for sale at Medicine Man marijuana dispensary in Denver, Friday Dec. 27, 2013. Medicine Man was among the first batch of Denver businesses which received their licenses allowing them to legally sell recreational marijuana on Friday.

(AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

Denver hands out first recreational pot sales licenses

KRISTEN WYATT
Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The first batch of Denver businesses approved to sell recreational marijuana got their licenses Friday, the owners mugging for pictures and saying they never thought they'd see the day when they'd get a permit to sell pot. Applause broke out and cameras whirled when

the first license was issued from the city's Department of Excise and Licenses. The city awarded eight licenses for retail shops, 30 licenses for pot growers and four licenses for makers of cannabis-infused products such as pot brownies. One businessman joked about getting arrested for having a joint at a 1971 Black Sabbath concert. Others

shared hugs and stories about marijuana's route to legalization. "I think it's about time that adults can imbibe in marijuana," said Donald Andrews of one of the eight shops, LoDo Wellness Center in downtown Denver. The licensed sellers went through a state and local licensing process that included public hearings to ask neighbors about shop

locations. Owners also underwent more than a dozen fire and building inspections for each shop.

"It's been a grueling process but we're finally here," said Justin Jones, owner of Dank Colorado, a retail shop. Recreational pot for adults over 21 has been legal in Colorado for more than a year, but retail sales of the drug aren't allowed

until 8 a.m. on Jan. 1. Washington state, the only other state to allow recreational pot use by adults, plans to have stores open by late spring of next year. Denver is one of 19 municipalities and seven counties in Colorado that will allow retail sales of recreational pot.

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Police release documents on Newtown massacre

JOHN CHRISTOFFERSEN

Associated Press

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut

(AP) — Police released

thousands of pages of documents Friday from the investigation into last year's school massacre in Newtown, Connecticut which could shed additional light on the world of the 20-year-old gunman.

The paperwork "has been redacted according to law," and it includes text, photos, videos and recordings of emergency calls received by state police.

In a letter accompanying the report, Reuben F. Bradford, commissioner of the state Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, wrote that much of the identifying information involving children and many witnesses was being withheld.

Prosecutors issued a summary of the investigation last month that portrayed the gunman, Adam Lan-

za, as obsessed with mass murders, but the report concluded that Lanza's motives for the massacre might never be known.

The summary report referred to items found on a computer at Lanza's house that included writings detailing relationships, personal beliefs, a daily schedule, desires, goals and other topics.

Lanza gunned down 20 young children and six educators with a semi-automatic rifle at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012, after killing his mother inside their home. He committed suicide with a handgun as police arrived at the school.

To try to figure out the motive, investigators said, they interviewed members of Lanza's family, teachers and others. They said they also tried within the limits of privacy laws to gather information on his medical treatment.



A makeshift memorial with crosses for the victims of the Sandy Hook massacre stands outside a home in Newtown, Conn., for the one-year anniversary of the shootings. Connecticut authorities Friday, Dec. 27, 2013, released state police documents from the investigation into last year's Newtown school massacre.

(AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

Lanza "was undoubtedly afflicted with mental health problems; yet despite a fascination with mass shootings and firearms, he

displayed no aggressive or threatening tendencies," it said.

In fifth grade, Lanza wrote "The Big Book of Granny," in which the main character has a gun in her cane and shoots people, and another character talks of liking to hurt people, especially children. The book was among items seized from Lanza's home, but there was no indication he ever handed in the book at school.

Lanza became obsessed with the 1999 bloodbath at Columbine High in Colorado and other mass killings, the report said. He also kept a spreadsheet ranking mass murders.

The report also said that in

2005, Lanza was diagnosed with Asperger's disorder — an autism-like condition that is not associated with violence — and that he lacked empathy for others and behaved strangely. Nobody was allowed into his room,

not even to clean, according to the report. It said Lanza also disliked birthdays, Christmas and holidays and did not like to have his hair cut.

He also wouldn't touch doorknobs, his food had to be arranged on the plate in a certain way, and he changed clothes often during the day. He was a loner at school and was repelled by crowds and loud noises. □

Gambler rewards man who returned \$300K left in cab

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A poker player who left a bag with \$300,000 in the back seat of a Las Vegas taxi has given \$10,000 to the honest cabbie who returned the money.

Yellow Checker Star Cab Company CEO Bill Shranko said Friday the gambler made good on his promise to reward driver Gerardo Gamboa.

The cab company named Gamboa employee of the year, awarded him another

\$1,000 and gave him a gift certificate to a Las Vegas steakhouse.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that Gamboa was making a pickup Monday at the Bellagio when a hotel doorman noticed the brown paper bag.

Gamboa found bundles of \$100 bills inside.

The driver turned the money in to the cab company, and police linked it to the gambler, who they have not publically identified. □



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US military sex assault reports jump by 50 percent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of reported sexual assaults across the U.S. military shot up by more than 50 percent this year, an increase that defense officials say may suggest that victims are becoming more willing to come forward. A tumultuous year of scandals shined a spotlight on the crimes and put pressure on the military to take aggressive action. According to early data

obtained by The Associated Press, more than 5,000 reports of sexual assault were filed during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, compared to the 3,374 in 2012. That increase, officials said, suggests that confidence in the system is growing and that victims are more willing to come forward. Asked about the preliminary data, defense officials were cautious in their conclusions. But they

obtained by The Associated Press, more than 5,000 reports of sexual assault were filed during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, compared to the 3,374 in 2012. That increase, officials said, suggests that confidence in the system is growing and that victims are more willing to come forward. Asked about the preliminary data, defense officials were cautious in their conclusions. But they

said surveys, focus groups and meetings with service members throughout the year suggest that the number of actual incidents — from unwanted sexual contact and harassment to violent assaults — has remained largely steady.

"Given the multiple data points, we assess that this is more reporting," said Col. Alan R. Metzler, deputy director of the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention and response office. He

also noted that more victims are agreeing to make official complaints, rather than simply seeking medical care without filing formal accusations.

The military has long struggled to get victims to report sexual harassment and assault in a stern military culture that emphasizes rank, loyalty and toughness. Too often, victims have said they were afraid to report assaults to ranking officers, or that their initial complaints were rebuffed or ignored.

As a result, the crime has been vastly underreported. That became evident when officials announced earlier this year that an anonymous survey had revealed that about 26,000 service members reported some type of unwanted sexual contact or sexual assault.

According to the latest numbers, the increase in reports across the services ranges from a low of about 45 percent for the Air Force to a high of 86 percent for the Marines, the smallest service. The Navy had an increase of 46 percent and the Army, by far the largest military service, had a 50 percent jump.

As Congress debated

changes in the military's justice system, the Pentagon and the services instituted new training programs that targeted service members as well as top commanders and officers.

Several of the new programs were aimed at encouraging service members to be more vigilant, and to look out for each other and intercede if they saw a bad situation developing. There also were moves to restrict alcohol sales, since drinking has long been associated with sexual assault and harassment. By year's end, lawmakers passed legislation that strengthens legal rights for victims and strips military commanders of their ability to overturn jury convictions. It also requires a civilian review if a commander declines to prosecute a case and requires that any individual convicted of sexual assault face a dishonorable discharge or dismissal. Defense officials beat back efforts to more drastically change the military justice system that would take authority away from commanders and allow victims of rape and sexual assault to go outside the chain of command for prosecutions. □



In this photo, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey, center, testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing investigating the growing epidemic of sexual assaults within the military. The number of reported sexual assaults across the military shot up by more than 50 percent this year. Defense officials suggest that victims are becoming more willing to come forward. The increase follows a tumultuous year of scandals that shined a spotlight on the crimes and put pressure on the military to act aggressively.

(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)



Denver hands out first recreational pot sales licenses

Continued from front

Only existing medical marijuana businesses are now allowed to make the transition to recreational sales. The licensed shops were handed red posters Friday and stacks of fliers instructing pot customers on marijuana limits, including the fact that users can't consume pot in public, drive high, or take pot out of state.

"These are big businesses that have been operating in good standing in our city for a long time," said Amber Miller, spokeswoman for Denver Mayor Michael Hancock.

Colorado has approved 348 marijuana business licenses. More than a hundred of those are still pending in Denver, meaning the city is likely to have many more shops in the first few months of 2014.

Still unclear is what the morning of Jan. 1 will look like. Some pot shop owners are planning to install purchasing caps and other limits to try to avoid a run on weed.

"We're hoping next week will be a fun-filled experience but a responsible one," said Elan Nelson of Medicine Man. "But this is a new experience for all of us, I guess we'll just have to find out." □



Employees trim pot plants to be sold at Medicine Man marijuana dispensary in Denver, Friday Dec. 27, 2013. Medicine Man was among the first batch of Denver businesses which received their licenses allowing them to legally sell recreational marijuana on Friday.

(AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

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Target: Customers' PINs were stolen

BARBARA ORTUTAY
MAE ANDERSON
Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Target said Friday that debit card PIN numbers were among the financial information stolen from millions of U.S. customers who shopped at the retailer earlier this month.

The company said the stolen personal identification numbers, which shoppers type in to keypads to make secure transactions, were encrypted and that this strongly reduces risk to customers. In addition to the encrypted PINs, customer names, credit and debit card numbers, card expiration dates and the embedded code on the magnetic strip on back of the cards were stolen from about 40 million credit and debit cards used at Target between Nov. 27 and Dec. 15.

Security experts say it's the second-largest theft of

card accounts in U.S. history, surpassed only by a scam that began in 2005 involving retailer TJX Cos. Target said it doesn't have access to nor does it store the encryption key within its system, and the PIN information can only be decrypted when it is received by the retailer's external, independent payment processor.

"We remain confident that PIN numbers are safe and secure," spokeswoman Molly Snyder said in an emailed statement Friday. "The PIN information was fully encrypted at the keypad, remained encrypted within our system, and remained encrypted when it was removed from our systems."

However, Gartner security analyst Avivah Litan said Friday that the PINs for the affected cards are not safe and people "should change them at this point." □

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Bail hearing set for PA monsignor after reversal

MARYCLAIRE DALE
Associated Press**PHILADELPHIA (AP)** — Lawyers for a Roman Catholic church official will demand his immediate release from prison Monday after an appeals court overturned his conviction in a novel priest-abuse case aimed squarely at the church hierarchy in Philadelphia.

Monsignor William Lynn, 62, is the first Catholic official ever prosecuted over his handling of priest sex-abuse complaints. He has served 18 months of the 3- to 6-year sentence handed down by a judge who said he helped predators remain in ministry, endangering new victims.

But the Superior Court threw out the conviction Thursday, ruling that the state's child-endangerment law did not apply in the late 1990s to church supervisors like Lynn. The Superior Court said the case never should have been filed.

"The laws at that time were inadequate to deal with this kind of problem. And I think that the judge and the prosecutor stretched the law, trying to find some way to punish somebody," the Rev. Thomas Reese, a Jesuit theologian and senior analyst with the Na-

tional Catholic Reporter, said Friday. "They stretched the law too far, in the opinion of the appeals court."

The bail issue now moves back to the trial judge, Common Pleas Judge M. Teresa Sarmina, who had upheld the charges and ultimately blasted Lynn for failing to stand up to his bishops. Lynn won't be in court Monday to face her for the first time since his July 2012 sentencing.

However, his lawyers filed a bail petition seeking immediate action "in light of the unequivocal language of the Superior Court opinion, as well as the amount of time Msgr. Lynn has already served." Prosecutors vowed a fight to restore Lynn's conviction, and will oppose bail.

Even if Lynn goes free, his long ordeal offers "a warning, to every 'yes man' in the church, that that can get him in trouble," Reese said.

The three-month trial last year painted Lynn, the secretary for clergy, as a loyal if timid aide to Cardinals Anthony Bevilacqua and Justin Rigali. He documented hundreds of abuse complaints filed against dozens of priests at the archdiocese from the late 1950s



Monsignor William Lynn leaves the Criminal Justice Center in Philadelphia. Lawyers for Lynn will demand his immediate release from prison Monday after an appeals court overturned his conviction in a novel priest-abuse case aimed squarely at the church hierarchy in Philadelphia.

(AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

through his 1992-2004 tenure, then locked the explosive files in a secret archives room. The accused priests were often transferred to new parishes without warning, although Lynn said he often tried to get them and their victims help.

Prosecutors tracked down many of the scarred victims from the secret files. Sarmina allowed 20 of them to testify about their sordid

childhood encounters with trusted priests, even though the crimes were too old to prosecute. They described countless rapes, sadist religious rituals and failed attempts to get help from other adults.

The Superior Court never ruled on whether that graphic testimony was appropriate at Lynn's trial. But the testimony served as something of a "truth and

reconciliation" panel for Catholics, Reese said.

The defense has long argued that Lynn was charged retroactively under a 2007 law that broadened the scope of the child-endangerment law to include those who supervise predators. Sarmina, though, had rejected the argument. The Superior Court found her ruling "fundamentally flawed." □

Times Square's crystal ball gets new skin

DAVID B. CARUSO
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Electricians working atop a New York City skyscraper on Friday installed the last of the 2,688 crystal triangles that give the Times Square New Year's Eve Ball its shimmer, including a panel dreamt up by a 12-year-old former

cancer patient. Each year, the intricate Waterford crystals that make up the skin of the huge orb are replaced with new pieces of glass. This year's design features a kaleidoscopic pattern that will refract light in a splash of 16 million colors as the ball drops down a flagpole

at the stroke of midnight. The ball is lit from within by 32,256 powerful diodes. It takes Waterford craftsmen about a year to make the crystals used in the ball, Curtis said. Bolting them onto the ball's metal frame takes two weeks.



Landmark Signs & Electric New Year's Eve Ball Crew members Nick Bonavita, second from right, and Nick Russomanno, right, install a Waterford crystal triangle on the New Year's Eve Ball during a media event Friday Dec. 27, 2013 on the roof of One Times Square in New York.

(AP Photo/Tina Fineberg)

Federal judge rules NSA phone surveillance legal

LARRY NEUMEISTER
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Citing the Sept. 11 attacks, a federal judge ruled Friday that the National Security Agency's bulk collection of millions of Americans' telephone records is legal, a valuable tool in the nation's arsenal to fight terrorism that "only works because it collects everything."

U.S. District Judge William Pauley said in a written opinion that the program lets the government connect fragmented and fleeting communications and "represents the government's counter-punch" to the al-Qaida's terror network's use of technology to operate decentralized and plot international terrorist attacks remotely.

"This blunt tool only works because it collects everything," Pauley said. "The collection is broad, but the scope of counterterrorism investigations is unprecedented."

Pauley's decision contrasts with a ruling earlier this month by U.S. District Court Judge Richard Leon, who granted a preliminary injunction against the collecting of phone records of two men who had challenged the program. The Washington, D.C. jurist said the program likely violates the U.S. Constitution's ban on unreasonable search. The judge has since stayed the effect of his ruling, pending a government appeal.

Both cases now move to appeals courts for a conflict that some believe will eventually be settled by the Supreme Court. The chances that the nation's top court will address it increase if the appeals courts reach conflicting opinions or if the current use of the program is declared illegal. Pauley said the mass collection of phone data "significantly increases the NSA's capability to detect the faintest patterns left behind by individuals affiliated with foreign terrorist organizations. Armed with all the metadata, NSA can draw connections it might otherwise never be able to find."

He added: "As the Sept. 11 attacks demonstrate, the cost of missing such a threat can be horrific."

Pauley said the attacks "revealed, in the starkest terms, just how dangerous and interconnected the world is. While Americans depended on technology for the conveniences of modernity, al-Qaida plotted in a seventh-century milieu to use that technology against us. It was a bold jujitsu. And it succeeded because conventional intelligence gathering could not detect diffuse filaments connecting al-Qaida."

The judge said the NSA intercepted seven calls made by one of the Sept. 11 hijackers in San Diego prior to the attacks, but mistakenly concluded that he was overseas because it lacked the kind of information it can now collect.

Still, Pauley said such a program, if unchecked, "imperils the civil liberties of every citizen" and he noted the lively debate about the subject across the nation, in Congress and at the White House.

"The question for this court is whether the government's bulk telephony metadata program is lawful. This court finds it is. But the question of whether that program should be conducted is for the other two coordinate branches of government to decide," he said.

A week ago, President Barack Obama said there may be ways of changing the program so that it has sufficient oversight and transparency. In ruling, Pauley cited the emergency of the program after 20 hijackers took over four planes in the 2001 attacks, flying two into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon and a fourth into a Pennsylvania field as passengers tried to take back the aircraft.

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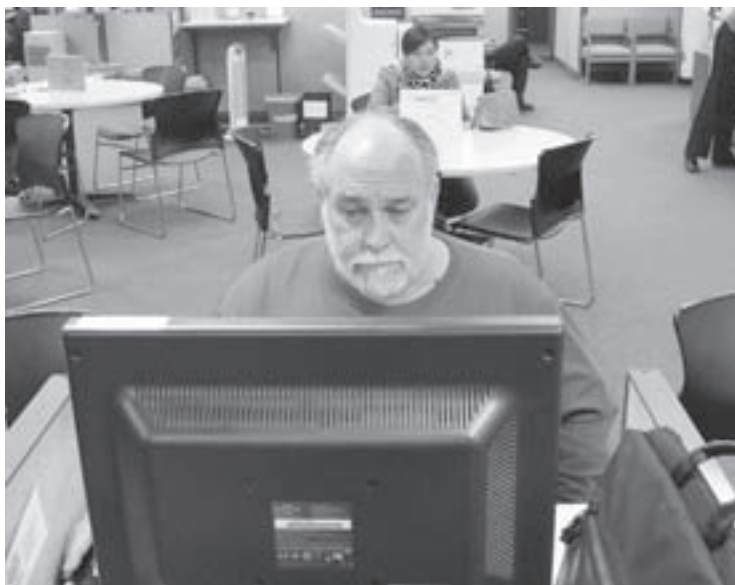
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US Financial Front:

1.3M Americans losing unemployment benefits Saturday



Richard Mattos, 59, looks for jobs at a state-run employment center in Salem, Ore., on Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013. Mattos is one of more than 1 million Americans who will lose federal unemployment benefits at year's end.

(AP Photo/Jonathan J. Cooper)

BRADLEY KLAPPER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 1 million Americans are bracing for a harrowing, post-Christmas jolt as extended federal unemployment benefits come to a sudden halt this weekend, entailing potentially significant implications for the recovering U.S. economy.

For families dependent on cash assistance, the end of the federal government's "emergency unemployment compensation" will mean some difficult belt-tightening as enrollees lose their average monthly stipend of \$1,166.

Jobless rates could drop, but analysts say the economy may suffer with less money for consumers to spend on everything from clothes to cars. Having let

the "emergency" program expire as part of a budget deal, it's unclear if Congress has the appetite to start it anew.

An estimated 1.3 million people will be cut off when the federally funded unemployment payments end Saturday.

Some 214,000 Californians will lose their payments, a figure rising to more than a half-million by June, the Labor Department said. In the last 12 months Californians received \$4.5 billion in federal jobless benefits, much put back into the local economy.

Started under President George W. Bush, the benefits were designed as a cushion for the millions of U.S. citizens who lost their jobs in a recession and failed to find new ones while receiving state job-

less benefits, which in most states expire after six months. Another 1.9 million people across the U.S. are expected to exhaust their state benefits before the end of June.

"When Congress comes back to work, their first order of business should be making this right," President Barack Obama said last week at his year-end news conference.

But Obama has no quick fix. He hailed this month's two-

year budget agreement as a breakthrough of bipartisan cooperation while his administration works with Democratic allies in the House, where Republicans have a majority, and Senate to revive an extension of jobless benefits for those unemployed more than six months.

The Obama administration says those payments have kept 11.4 million people out of poverty and benefited almost 17 million children.

The cost of them since 2008 has totaled \$225 billion.

At the depth of the recession, laid off workers could qualify for up to 99 weeks of benefits, including the initial 26 weeks provided by states. The most recent extension allowed a total of up to 73 weeks, depending on the state.

Restoring up to 47 extra weeks of benefits through 2014 would cost \$19 billion, according to the Congressional Budget office. □



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Powerful bomb kills senior politician in Lebanese capital



Lebanese security forces inspect the scene of a car bombing in Beirut, Dec. 27, 2013. A powerful bomb shook central Beirut Friday morning, killing at least six people, officials said, and injuring dozens more. Among the dead was Mohamad Chatah, a former Lebanese finance minister and ambassador to the United States.

(Bryan Denton/New York Times)

Iranian official calls for direct talks with US

BY NASSER KARIMI
 Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The top foreign adviser to Iran's supreme leader on Friday called for separate talks directly with the United States amid the multilateral negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. The remarks Friday by Ali Akbar Velayati signaled a high-level endorsement of the policies of President Hassan Rouhani, who has been sharply criticized by hardliners over the landmark nuclear deal that Iran reached with world powers last month and over other contacts with the U.S.

Velayati said Iran benefits by talking separately with each of the so-called "5+1" powers — the grouping of the United States, Russia, France, Britain, China and Germany, with which it negotiated the interim nuclear deal and with which it is still to work out a permanent accord. Each has separate interests, he said in comments on television that were also carried on the semi-official Mehr news agency. "We aren't on the right path if we don't have one-on-one talks with the six countries," he said. "We have to talk with the countries separately. ... It would

be wrong if we bring the countries into unity against us, since there are rifts among them over various international issues." Hard-liners have blasted the nuclear accord as a surrender to Western pressure and have criticized Rouhani over phone conversation he had with President Barack Obama in September when Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met with his American counterpart. U.S. officials have also said Iran and the Americans met in secret for months ahead of the nuclear deal. □

ANNE BARNARD
 DAN BILEFSKY
 © 2013 New York Times

BEIRUT - A powerful bomb shook central Beirut on Friday, killing at least six people, officials said, and injuring dozens more. Among the dead was Mohamad B. Chatah, a former Lebanese finance minister and ambassador to the United States who was a vocal critic of the government in neighboring Syria and its ally, the Lebanese militia Hezbollah.

It was not immediately clear whether Chatah was the intended target of the bomb. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, which was reminiscent of a string of unsolved bombings that have targeted anti-Syrian politicians over the past decade. Chatah was a prominent member of the Future bloc, the mainly Sunni party headed by Saad Hariri, son of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, whose death in a 2005 bombing in Beirut sparked the March 14 protest movement that helped end Syria's 29-year military presence in Lebanon. Nohad al-Mashnouq, a member of Parliament in the Future bloc and a friend of Chatah's, confirmed in an interview that Chatah had been killed. The attack deepened the sense of instability in Lebanon, which is sharply divided over the war in neighboring Syria, with the Future bloc and its allies backing the opponents of President Bashar Assad and Hezbollah supporting him. The country has been without a functioning government for months because of a related political stalemate. Several car bombs have exploded in the southern suburbs, where Hezbollah has many supporters, with Syrian insurgents or allied Lebanese militants being widely blamed for the attacks.

But Friday's bombing was the first to tear through Beirut's shiny renovated downtown since Rafik Hariri's death, dealing a psychological blow to Beirut's perennially resilient residents.

"This is a time when this plaza would be crowded, full of hope and colors, and now it's black with this criminal act," said Elie Ward, the manager of the nearby Sultan Ibrahim restaurant. Saad Hariri, the Future leader, issued a statement implying that Hezbollah, Lebanon's most powerful political party, was to blame, and noting that the international tribunal that has indicted members of Hezbollah in his father's killing is due to hold its opening sessions in The Hague in early January. □



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3 killed as police clash with protesters in Egypt

MAGGIE MICHAEL

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — With water cannons and tear gas, Egyptian riot police battled on Friday with hundreds of rock-throwing supporters of ousted ex-President Mohammed Morsi in clashes across the country that left three dead, according to officials.

Authorities meanwhile unveiled a new tactic to contain protests called by Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood group and its allies, calling on large families to post armed men near the likely sites of demonstrations.

Friday is the day of the week in Egypt in which protests are typically at their largest. The day's demonstrations follow an announcement by the authorities that they would use the Brotherhood's new designation as a terrorist organization to impose harsh prison sen-

tences on protesters, and poses the first test of whether that will deter them. In at least seven southern provinces, security and local officials said that the

authorities turned to armed civilians from anti-Islamist and pro-government families to provide support to security forces, help guard police stations and church-

es and confront pro-Morsi rallies. One high-ranking Interior Ministry official said that this is part of a bigger deal between the security apparatus and the big clans in the south, the most conservative part of Egypt, which has a strong tradition both of inter-family feuding and of Islamist militancy. Families would hand over heavy weapons to the government but would be allowed to carry lighter ones when facing off with Islamists, and in return authorities would support candidates from those families in upcoming parliamentary elections. The tactic is not new in Egypt. In the 1990s, during the Islamic insurgency against ousted President Hosni Mubarak, the government formed so-called "popular committees" in which relatives of ruling party members, parliamentarians and other

prominent government allies helped expel militants from towns and cities.

In at least two incidents on Friday in the southern provinces of Assiut and Qena, witnesses said, two small rallies quickly dispersed after pro-government civilians mounting pickup trucks fired their machine guns, into the air driving protesters away.

In Cairo, riot police chased rock-throwing and Molotov-hurling student protesters chanting against the military and the police at the Islamic Al-Azhar University. In a second district of Alf Maskan, an Associated Press cameraman saw Islamist protesters hurling Molotov cocktails and fireworks at security forces while civilians, on the police side, hurled stones. The street was littered with rocks, shattered glass and black soot. □



Supporters of Egypt's ousted President Mohammed Morsi prepare to burn tires during clashes with security forces in Cairo, Egypt, Friday, Dec. 27, 2013. Egyptian security forces firing water cannon and tear gas clashed across the country with hundreds of rock-throwing supporters of the ousted ex-president Friday and several people were killed, according to authorities.

(AP Photo/Mostafa Darwish)

South Sudan government agrees to end hostilities

JASON STRAZIUSO

TOM ODULA

Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — South Sudan's government agreed Friday at a meeting of East African leaders to end hostilities against rebels accused of trying to overthrow the young country, but the cease-fire was quickly thrown into doubt because the head of the rebellion was not invited.

An army spokesman suggested the fighting could go on despite the announcement by politicians in a faraway capital.

At the meeting in Kenya, South Sudan agreed not to carry out a planned offensive to recapture Bentiu, the capital of oil-producing Unity state, which is controlled by troops loyal to Riek Machar, the former

vice president vilified by the government as a corrupt coup plotter.

"We are not moving on Bentiu as long as the rebel forces abide by the cease-fire," said Michael Makuei Lueth, South Sudan's information minister.

But no one representing Machar was at the Nairobi meeting — a move possibly meant to deny him any elevated status that could also slow the search for peace. And Machar told the BBC that conditions for a truce were not yet in place.

In the field, the military reported no immediate changes in the battle for control of the world's newest country.

Said army spokesman Col. Philip Aguer: "We have not seen any sign of a cease-

fire.

There is no cease-fire agreed by the two sides," an indication the planned

assault on Bentiu could still take place.

Elsewhere, the country's military advanced on the

rebel-held town of Malakal early Friday and had taken control of it by noon, Aguer said. □

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Venezuelans angered by delay in critical inflation report

FABIOLA SANCHEZ

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— There's one burning question among economists in Venezuela these days: What happened to the November inflation report?

It's been more than two weeks since the deadline passed for the central bank to publish its closely-watched consumer price index and so far authorities have been mum about when it will be released. Economists and opposition politicians say the delay is a sign the government is trying to hide its embarrassing record controlling inflation, now running at

54 percent, after President Nicolas Maduro last month delivered a rare rebuke of the way the bank measures prices. They warn of more interference to come, undermining an institution that until now has been a redoubt of balance and credibility amid a decade-long socialist push that has divided Venezuelans.

"The most extreme way of manipulating the data is not publishing it," Victor Olivo, a former manager of macroeconomics analysis at the central bank, told The Associated Press.

The central bank's bylaws require it to publish inflation data within the first 10

days of each month. On the rare occasions when it has missed the cutoff date before, it was late by only a few days.

Intrigue about the delay began to build after the bank abruptly cancelled a Dec. 19 news conference to release the report.

To date, nobody has of-

Maduro last month questioned the reliability of the central bank's data, saying that internal calculations he had seen showed prices fell 5 percent in November as a result of the government's actions.

Are the statisticians at the bank able to "see what's happening beyond the

ing the South America's largest oil economy: record levels of shortages.

The October report's so-called scarcity index showed that out of 100 products measured, 22 were out of stock.

It's not just the inflation report that has economists concerned the bank is los-



A taxi driver in a 1975 Ford Maverick picks up passenger in downtown Caracas, Venezuela. It's been more than two weeks since the deadline passed for Venezuela's central bank to publish its closely-watched consumer price index and so far authorities have been mum about when it will be released.

(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

ferred an explanation, even in the face of a public letter of protest signed by 20 recognized local economists. The bank declined to comment when contacted by the AP.

The only official who has defended the bank, Elias Eljuri, president of the national statistics institute, said the delay is due to "atypical" factors stemming from the government's slashing of prices of home appliances last month after it seized several retail chains accused of charging speculative prices. Under no circumstances are the numbers being cooked, he said.

technocracy?" Maduro asked in a nationally televised Cabinet meeting on Nov. 23.

Economists say Maduro's forecast has no basis. While the prices of televisions, stoves and refrigerators did fall by more than half after the government offensive, appliances carry around a 2 percent weighting in the consumer price index, making it impossible to swing the gauge at a time prices for food, clothing and services are rising by more than 5 percent a month.

Economists also depend on the inflation report to monitor another ill batter-

ing its autonomy.

In recent years, the monetary authority has stopped publishing data on private investment and expansion of the money supply, one of the main drivers of inflation. It's also followed through on orders to transfer part of its dollar reserves to fund government spending.

The fear, says Olivo, is that Venezuela will follow in the footsteps of Argentina, which this year became the first country censured by the Washington-based International Monetary Fund for producing unreliable data that wildly underreports inflation. □

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US boy, 9, is youngest to reach Aconcagua summit

MICHAEL WARREN
Associated Press
BUENOS AIRES, Argentina
(AP) — A 9-year-old boy from Southern California

and Southern hemispheres. Tyler Armstrong of Yorba Linda reached the summit on Christmas Eve with his father Kevin and a Tibetan

who handled the expedition's logistics from the city of Mendoza. "It's a record. Never before has a child as young as

sacrificed some 500 years ago at 16,400 feet (5,300 meters) on Piramide, one of the mountain's lower peaks. Scientific tests on the mummy, recovered in 1985, put his age at about

7. Only 30 percent of the 7,000 people who obtain permits to climb Aconcagua each year make the summit, Garcia said, and no one under 14 is usually allowed. □



This photo shows Kevin and his son, Tyler Armstrong, 7, after reaching the summit of Mount Whitney in the Sierra Nevada, Calif. On Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2013, Tyler, now 9, became the youngest person in recorded history to reach the summit of Argentina's Aconcagua mountain, which at 22,841 feet is the tallest peak in the Western and Southern hemispheres.

(AP Photo/Kevin Armstrong)

has become the youngest person in recorded history to reach the summit of Argentina's Aconcagua mountain, which at 22,841 feet (6,962 meters) is the tallest peak in the Western

sherpa, Lhawang Dhondup, his team announced Friday. When they climbed back down to the base camp, Tyler was much less tired than his dad and their guide, said Nicolas Garcia,

nine reached the summit of Aconcagua," Garcia told The Associated Press. There was one younger boy who climbed the lower slopes of Aconcagua, Garcia noted: An Inca boy was

Rival tablet manufacturers launch in Haiti

TRENTON DANIEL
Associated Press
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Two tech companies have launched rival ventures to build Android tablets in Haiti, a country with little recent experience in electronics manufacturing. Startups Surtab SA and Handxom SA began production last month and plan to sell the 7-inch touchscreen devices to phone stores nationwide and markets overseas. Surtab says it has already sold hundreds of tablets to customers including Haiti's education and planning ministries and mobile phone giant Digicel, which sells the tablets in its stores. Handxom plans to open a showroom next month in the Port-au-Prince area and project manager Jimmy Jacques said the company has already sold 300 units in the past two weeks. The owners of both companies say their businesses

show that Haiti is capable of manufacturing more than just clothing, while also paying people decent wages. "We can do high quality products here — not just T-shirts, but something with a little more value, which can allow us to pay our workers better and create a different type of economy than what's been the case," said CEO Maarten Boute, a Belgian businessman who worked until 2012 as the CEO for Digicel's Haiti office. Haiti once had an electronic assembly sector, but a U.N.-imposed embargo in the 1990s forced many of the companies to close. Founded by a Danish couple, a prominent Haitian family and Boute, Surtab began with the help of a \$200,000 grant from the Pan-American Development Fund. It now employs 50 people, 20 of whom assemble the

units in an air-tight production room. Surtab employees earn a base salary of \$6.81 per work day with a bonus per unit that can push pay above \$13, said Diderot Musset, Surtab's operations manager. Haiti's minimum wage is \$4.54 a day. Handxom's Jimmy Jacques declined to say how much the company pays its employees but said it hopes to hire as many as 400 people. The most basic tablet sells for about \$100 and comes with a Wi-Fi. Prices rise to \$280 for a model with a high-definition screen and 3G phone connection. All come with 7-inch screens. The baseline Surtab machine has a 1.2 GHz dual-core processor with 1 GB of RAM. The high-definition model carries a quad-core processor and 2 GB of RAM. Most Haitians cannot afford the devices. □

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Lack of customers dooms several Cuban businesses

ANDREA RODRIGUEZ ANNE-MARIE GARCIA
Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The dented metal pizza trays are packed away, so too the old blender that never worked when it was needed. Gone is the sweet smell of rising dough that infused Julio Cesar Hidalgo's Havana apartment when he and his girlfriend were in business for themselves, churning out cheesy pies for hungry costumers. Two years on the front lines of Cuba's experiment with limited free market capitalism has left Hidalgo broke, out of work and facing a possible crushing fine. But the 33-year-old known for his wide smile and sunny disposition says the biggest loss is harder to define.

"I feel frustrated and let down," Hidalgo said, slumped in a rocking chair one recent December afternoon, shrugging his shoulders as he described the pizzeria's collapse.

rant and cafeteria owners, a seamstress and taekwondo instructor, a vendor of bootleg DVDs and a woman renting her rooms out to well-heeled tourists. Their fates tell a story of divided fortunes.

Of the six ventures that relied on revenue from cash-strapped islanders, four are now out of business, their owners in more dire financial straits than when they started. But the three enterprises that cater to well-heeled foreigners, and to the minority of well-paid Cubans who work for foreign businesses, are still going and in some cases thriving.

While the sample size is small, the numbers point to a basic problem that economists who follow Cuba have noted from the start: There simply isn't enough money to support a thriving private sector on an island where salaries average \$20 a month.

"Clearly, there is a mac-



A woman works out at a private gym located in a small commercial space in Havana, Cuba, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013. Raul Castro came down in favor of increased regulation recently, sternly warning entrepreneurs that "those pressuring us to move faster are moving us toward failure."

(AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

foreign investors. Now a professor at Colombia's Javeriana University, he says one has only to look at the trends since 2011 to see the private sector economy is nearly tapped out. After a surge of enthusiasm, the number of islanders working for themselves has stalled for the

years, and two-thirds are gone within a decade. The failure rate of Cuban entrepreneurs followed by AP was 44 percent in less than two years, and worse if one considers only those that relied primarily on Cuban customers.

"There's not enough money circulating in the economy in the hands of everyday people," said Ted Henken, a professor of Latin American studies at Baruch College in New York and author of an upcoming book on private enterprise in Cuba. "You're all competing for the same customers, most of whom are poor and have very limited disposable income."

Economists have criticized the Cuban government for a series of measures to crack down on what it sees as illegal activities — including banning private movie cinemas, taxing the import of hard-to-get products in travelers' luggage, and banning the sale of imported clothing. But on Saturday, Castro came down firmly in favor of increased regulation, sternly warning entrepreneurs that "those pressuring us to move faster are moving us toward failure."

The only two operations that rely on everyday Cubans for revenue which remain in business are gymnasiums. One is run by Maria Regla Zaldivar, who in 2011 was giving tae-

kwondo classes to children in Nuevo Vedado and dreamed of converting a ruined dry cleaning factory into a proper gymnasium. The factory remains a crumbling shell, but Zaldivar said her business continues. She declined to grant a formal interview, but said in a brief phone call that she had rented a small space near her apartment and continued to give classes.

The other success story belongs to Neysi Hernandez, the mother of Julio Cesar Hidalgo's girlfriend. Hernandez opened a simple gymnasium for women in the courtyard and garage of her home in Havana's La Lisa neighborhood, charging the equivalent of \$5 a month for membership. Two years later, she has 25 paying clients and ekes out a small profit.

Hernandez says her customers are loyal, despite the fact the gymnasium lacks basic amenities like a shower room, lockers and towels. Unable to afford imported equipment, Hernandez uses sand-filled plastic water bottles for weights. Her three exercise bicycles and mechanical treadmill are creaky and aging.

"My gymnasium is modest, but they like it," Hernandez said, adding she has dreams of one day installing a small massage room and sauna. "A little bit at a time." □



A barber shaves a customer's head at his small private business where a poster hangs of Fidel Castro in Havana, Cuba, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013.

(AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

"The business didn't turn out as I had hoped." The Associated Press recently checked in with nine small business owners whose fortunes it first reported on in 2011 as they set up shop amid the excitement of President Raul Castro's surprising embrace of some free enterprise. Among them were restau-

roeconomic environment that does not favor the private sector or the expansion of demand that the private sector requires," said Pavel Vidal, a former Cuban Central Bank economist.

Vidal has long called on Communist authorities to adopt a huge stimulus package or more aggressively seek capital from

past two years at about 444,000 — or 9 percent of the workforce.

Even in developed countries where entrepreneurs have access to capital, loans and a wide pool of paying customers, startups are risky ventures. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, about half of all new establishments in America close within five



Loyal visitors to Aruba honored at the Divi Phoenix Resort!



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Canada; Theresa Gelinas and Ralph Dragon of Fremont, New Hampshire; Charles F. and Marilyn Flynn of Weymouth, Massachusetts; Barbara Harvey of Sandy, Utah; and Chao O' Brien of New Jersey. The honorees are members of Divi Phoenix Beach Resort and have been enjoying the Island every year.



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under a single roof. Renaissance Mall wants to please all of its clients, so they will be open tomorrow, Sunday, December 29, from 10am till 2pm. Renaissance Mall, a relaxing place and fabulous to visit, has everything available for every taste and budget. If you wish to receive more information, visit their website www.shoprenaissancearuba.com or become a fan on their Facebook Fanpage to receive the latest news and be aware of all their events and campaigns. □

Beauty On The Beach

Alyssa Jones

She is from Toronto, Canada. It's her second time in Aruba, staying with her family at Renaissance Ocean tower. She loves Aruba's beaches, shopping and food.

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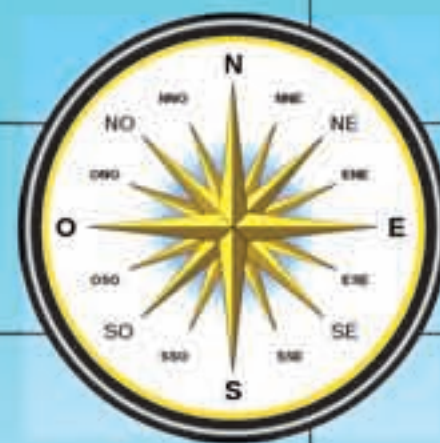
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Boston Marathon bombing AP sports story of year



In this Monday, April 15, 2013 file photo, medical workers aid injured people following an explosion at the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon in Boston.

Associated Press

RACHEL COHEN
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Boston Marathon bombing was selected the U.S. sports story of the year Friday in an annual vote conducted by The Associated Press. Two pressure cooker bombs exploded near the finish line of the April 15 race in an area packed with fans cheering the passing runners. Three people were killed and more than 260 injured, including at least 16 who lost limbs.

Authorities say brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, ethnic Chechens from Russia who emigrated

to the United States as children, planned and carried out the bombings in retaliation for U.S. involvement in Muslim countries. Ninety-six ballots were submitted from U.S. editors and news directors. Voters were asked to rank the top 10 sports stories of the year, with the first-place story receiving 10 points, the second-place story nine points and so on.

The marathon attack received 761 points and 67 first-place votes. It was also second in AP's national/international story of the year poll. The No. 2 sports story, Lance Armstrong's admis-

sion of doping, had five first-place votes and 517 points. The top five stories were grim: terrorism, performance-enhancing drug use, legal settlements, murder charges. The first on-field action came in at No. 6 — the Boston Red Sox's worst-to-first World Series title, though even that was tinged by the city's heartache less than seven months earlier.

Here are 2013's top 10 U.S. stories:

1. **BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS:** The throngs of spectators lining the streets at a storied big-city marathon were once a whole-

some scene of civic pride and friendly support. April's attack came as a haunting reminder that the crowds at a high-profile event are also a vulnerable target. Bag searches and metal detectors were a common sight at games the rest of the year. As victims persevere on prosthetic limbs, the 118th edition of the world's oldest marathon is set for the spring, with security undoubtedly heightened but runners determined to take part.

2. **LANCE ARMSTRONG:** The disgraced cyclist was also the No. 2 sports story last year. In 2012, the U.S. Anti-

Doping Agency stripped him of his record seven Tour de France titles, releasing mounds of evidence that he used PEDs to win them. In January, after years of defiant denials, Armstrong finally admitted it, telling Oprah Winfrey: "It's this myth, this perfect story, and it wasn't true."

3. **NFL CONCUSSION SETTLEMENT:** The NFL's settlement of lawsuits brought by thousands of former players will cost the league \$765 million but won't end the turmoil over head injuries in football — or the litigation.

Continued on Page 20

Poinsettia Bowl Utah State beats N.Illinois

The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Utah State's Brian Suite intercepted a Jordan Lynch pass and also recovered a fumble by the Heisman Trophy finalist to help the Aggies beat Northern Illinois 21-14 on Thursday in college football's Poinsettia Bowl.

Northern Illinois quarterback Lynch, who was third in the Heisman Trophy voting and made The Associated Press All-America team as an all-purpose player, had a rough end to his college career. Besides the two turnovers, he was held to just 39 yards rushing, keeping him from becoming the first major college player to rush for 2,000 yards and pass for 2,000 yards in the same season. Lynch ran for a touchdown and passed for another for NIU.

Joey DeMartino, who was back in San Diego where he went to high school and junior college, carried 23 times for 143 yards and a touchdown for Utah State.

Little Caesars Pizza Bowl

Pittsburgh 30, Bowling Green 27

Pittsburgh's Chris Blewitt kicked a 39-yard field goal with 1:17 left to give the Panthers a 30-27 victory over Bowling Green.

James Conner ran for 229 yards, breaking a Pittsburgh bowl record set by Tony Dorsett in 1977, and also played a handful of snaps on the defensive line.

Tyler Boyd gave Pittsburgh a boost with eight receptions for 173 yards — also a school bowl record — and scored on a punt return.

Pittsburgh pulled out the victory despite losing quarterback Tom Savage to a first-half rib injury. □



Utah State running back Joey DeMartino is presented the offensive Most Valuable Player trophy by Poinsettia Bowl president Bill Geppert after Utah State defeated Northern Illinois 21-14 in the Poinsettia Bowl NCAA college football game, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013, in San Diego.

Associated Press



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An emergency responder and volunteers, including Carlos Arredondo in the cowboy hat, push Jeff Bauman in a wheelchair after he was injured in an explosion near the finish line of the Boston Marathon Monday, April 15, 2013 in Boston.

Associated Press

Continued from Page 18

The retirees, who had accused the NFL of concealing the long-term dangers of concussions, will be eligible for compensation for certain neurological ailments. The league did not admit to any wrongdoing after mediation resulted in a settlement in August.

4. BASEBALL DRUG BANS: Alex Rodriguez's 211-game suspension was the longest of the 13 announced in August for players connected to a Florida anti-aging clinic accused of distributing banned PEDs. The Yankees' slugger was the only one to contest the penalty, and the year ends with an arbitrator yet to rule. In July, Ryan Braun, the 2011 NL MVP who had previously denied using banned substances, accepted a 65-game suspension.

5. HERNANDEZ ARREST: On Jan. 20, New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez had nine catches for 83 yards in an AFC championship game loss to Baltimore. Just more than five months later, he

was charged with murder. Prosecutors accuse him of shooting a friend to death on a secluded gravel road for talking to the wrong people at a nightclub. Hernandez awaits trial amid revelations of a history of violence by the player.

6. RED SOX WIN: Boston's 2011 season ended with a collapse and tales of fried chicken and beer in the clubhouse; 2012 ended with a last-place finish and 93 losses. New manager John Farrell and his bearded sluggers embraced "Boston Strong" and tied for the best record in the majors in a turnaround few predicted. With timely hits up and down the lineup throughout the playoffs, the Red Sox beat the St. Louis Cardinals in six games for their third World Series title in a decade.

7. RAVENS SUPER: The power came back on, and Baltimore held on. Ravens coach John Harbaugh beat younger brother Jim's San Francisco 49ers 34-31 in the Super Bowl in an unprecedented sibling showdown. But the game will be remembered most for the 34-minute outage at the Superdome in New Orleans. Baltimore star linebacker Ray Lewis rode into retirement with a ring.

8. AWESOME AUBURN: The Tigers' turnaround from a 3-9 record to the national title game was stunning enough. Even more shocking was how they did it. A deflected 73-yard touchdown pass with 25 seconds left gave Auburn a 43-38 win over Georgia on Nov. 16. The play that ended their next game will go down as one of the most memorable in college football history: Chris Davis' return of a missed field goal attempt more than 100 yards to beat No. 1 Alabama 34-28.

9. TE'O HOAX: Heisman Trophy runner-up Manti Te'o struggled in Notre Dame's lopsided loss to Alabama in the national title game Jan. 7. Nine days later, his name became forever linked to a most bizarre sports story. That tragic tale about his girlfriend's death told over and over as the linebacker starred for an undefeated team? She didn't exist. □

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Win or go home for Packers, Bears, Eagles, Cowboys

BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

A pair of the National Football League's most heated rivalries will determine the NFC division winners in the North and East on Sunday. One thing the NFL absolutely got right in recent years was making all final regular season games between division teams. It's worked again with the Philadelphia Eagles visiting the Dallas Cowboys in the night game, a little while after the Green Bay Packers and Chicago Bears settle the score in the North. "Wouldn't want it any other way," Green Bay coach Mike McCarthy said. "This is what you fight for, an opportunity to be in the playoffs."

And McCarthy gets back star quarterback Aaron Rodgers, who missed seven games and most of an eighth because of a broken left collarbone suffered against the Bears.

"We're in it," said Rodgers, who saw the Packers win only twice without him. "You know we have a chance against our rivals, and what a better way than to go down there and get some redemption and host a home playoff game."

While Rodgers comes back, the Cowboys will be without passer Tony Romo, who damaged his back in a tight win at Washington last Sunday and underwent surgery on Friday.

Kyle Orton will step up for the winner-take-all finale, his first start since 2011 with Kansas City.



Philadelphia Eagles' Bryce Brown, right, breaks free of Chicago Bears' James Anderson, top left, and Roc Carmichael during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

The Eagles have been the more balanced team, with a defense that pretty much improved as the season progressed, and a sensational offense.

And they will have their quarterback: Nick Foles has 25 touchdowns and two interceptions, and is healthy. They also have LeSean McCoy, who can become the first Philadelphia running back to lead the league in rushing since Hall of Famer Steve Van Buren in 1949.

At Soldier Field, the Bears and Packers will be searching for a semblance of defense in one of the most meaningful meetings of the

187-game rivalry. Chicago ranks 29th, Green Bay 26th on defense.

"Sometimes we're in the right place, but we're just not winning the one-on-ones or you missed a tackle," Bears defensive coordinator Mel Tucker said.

Four games have a bearing on the last AFC wild card: Miami-New York Jets, Cincinnati-Baltimore, Pittsburgh-Cleveland, and San Diego-Kansas City. Who has the edge?

Miami, because it's at home against a team it easily handled earlier, might be the one. But the Jets will play hard, sensing

a win might be enough to save the job of the coach the players adore, Rex Ryan.

So Baltimore, the defending champion, fits the role. Except Cincinnati is undefeated at home and still has a shot at the No. 2 overall seed.

That leaves San Diego, perhaps. Kansas City has nothing to play for, secure in the No. 5 slot in the AFC seedings, and San Diego has been coming on.

Maybe the team with the least pressure on it is Pittsburgh. Knowing the Steelers need those other three

contenders to lose, they might simply pay attention to handling archrival Cleveland and let things fall however they may.

If Carolina wins at Atlanta, they take the NFC South, going from a last-place tie in 2012 to the title the Falcons won a year ago. If Carolina, which has won 10 of 11, loses to the faltering Falcons,

New Orleans can sneak into the top spot in the division with a victory over Tampa Bay.

Meanwhile, after showing vulnerability at home for the first time in two seasons — and since Russell Wilson became the starting quarterback — by losing to Arizona last weekend, Seattle needs a win or tie against St. Louis to secure home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs. It might not be easy, because the Rams played the Seahawks tough in October, losing 14-9.

St. Louis has only one victory in Seattle since 2002, when the NFC West was formed.

With San Francisco in the playoffs, host Arizona would be the more desperate team. But San Francisco is eager to pounce if Seattle stumbles — and could get the top overall conference seed if Carolina also falls. The 49ers have won five in a row.

Also, there's Denver at Oakland, Buffalo at New England, Jacksonville at Indianapolis, Washington at New York Giants, Houston at Tennessee, Detroit at Minnesota. □

Cowboys' Tony Romo has surgery, out for Eagles finale

SCHUYLER DIXON

AP Sports Writer

IRVING, Texas (AP) — Quarterback Tony Romo had back surgery and will miss the Dallas Cowboys' regular season finale with the NFC East title and a playoff berth on the line.

Coach Jason Garrett said

Romo underwent surgery on Friday after consultation with doctors during the week following his injury in a win over Washington.

Kyle Orton will start for the Cowboys in the winner-take-all game against Philadelphia on Sunday.

Romo lost the past two win-

ner-take-all finales — to the New York Giants two years ago and to Washington last season. He also lost to the Eagles in the same situation in 2008.

The Cowboys have missed the last three postseasons. □



Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo is sacked by Washington Redskins outside linebacker Ryan Kerrigan during the second half of an NFL football game in Landover, Md., Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013.

Associated Press

NBA Capsules

Teague hoop at buzzer lifts Hawks in 2OT

CLEVELAND (AP) — Jeff Teague scored a career-high 34 points, including a tiebreaking 20-foot jumper at the buzzer in the second overtime, leading the Atlanta Hawks a 127-125 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Thursday night.

Teague's fallaway jumper over Tristan Thompson bounced off the rim five times before falling through the net. Teague, who also had 14 assists, fell to the floor after shooting the ball and was mobbed by his teammates.

Teague's 3-pointer with 4.9 seconds left in the first overtime tied it at 108.

Kyrie Irving led Cleveland with 40 points, including 12 in the second OT. Thompson had 22, and Dion Waiters scored 20 points in 41 minutes after missing three games because of tendinitis in his right wrist.

Hawks center Al Horford, who scored two baskets late in regulation to tie the game, departed with an apparent shoulder injury during the first OT.

ROCKETS 100, GRIZZLIES 92

HOUSTON (AP) — James Harden scored 11 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, helping Houston rally for the victory.

Harden struggled from the field, going 2 for 9, but was 22 of 25 from the free throw line. He made 9 of 11 foul shots in the final quarter.

Jeremy Lin had 14 of his 18 points in the fourth as Houston won for the third time in four games. The Rockets were coming off an impressive 111-98 victory at San Antonio on Christmas.

Houston center Dwight Howard battled foul trouble for most of the game and was held to two points and six rebounds. He was whistled for his fifth foul with 7:52 left in the third and never returned to the action.

Zach Randolph led Memphis with 23 points and 17 rebounds. The Grizzlies had won two in a row.

SPURS 116, MAVERICKS 109
DALLAS (AP) — Tim Duncan had 21 points and 13 rebounds in his 10th double-double of the season, helping San Antonio take ad-



Atlanta Hawks' Jeff Teague (0) reaches to save the ball in front of Cleveland Cavaliers' Earl Clark (6) during the third quarter of an NBA basketball game Thursday, Dec. 26, 2013, in Cleveland. Atlanta defeated Cleveland 127-125 in double overtime.

Associated Press

vantage of Dallas' weakened front court.

The 6-foot-11 Duncan worked most of the game with 6-7 DeJuan Blair defending him. Mavericks centers Samuel Dalembert and Brandan Wright were fighting an undisclosed illness.

Tony Parker led San Antonio with 23 points, and reserve Danny Green had 22 on perfect shooting. Green was 7 for 7 from the field and made each of his three foul shots.

Dirk Nowitzki had 25 points

and Monta Ellis scored 23 for the Mavericks. Blair had 14 points and 11 rebounds against his former team.

Wright was unable to play, and Dalembert had eight points in 24 minutes.

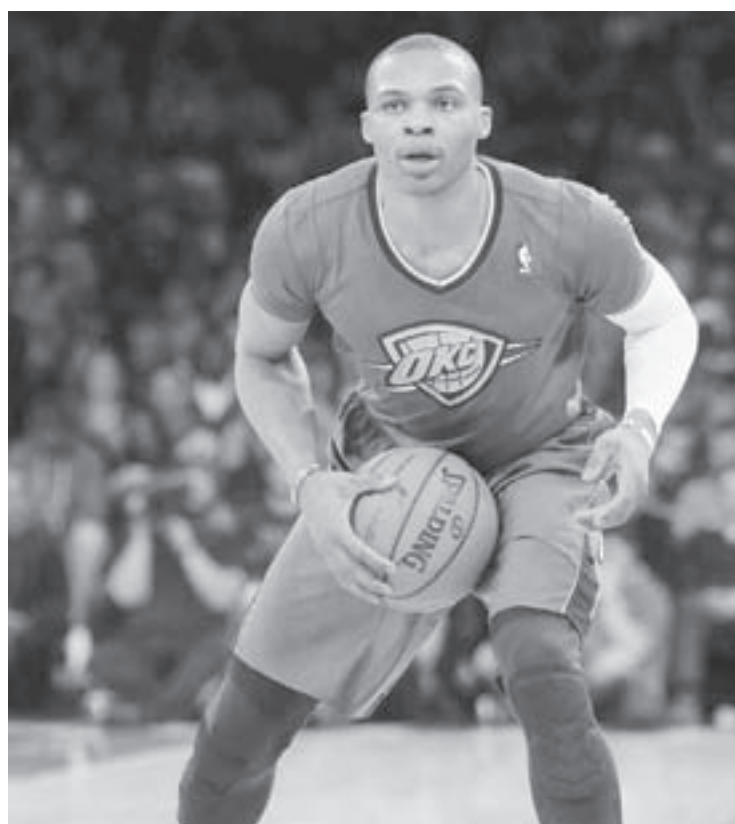
TRAIL BLAZERS 116, CLIPPERS 112, OT
PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — LaMarcus Aldridge had 32 points and 10 rebounds and the Trail Blazers held on for an overtime victory over the Clippers.

The Blazers have won seven of their last eight games and they've dropped just

two games at home this season.

But the Clippers, playing the second of a back-to-back, mounted a challenge after trailing by as many as 11 points early in the second half. Blake Griffin had 35 points and 11 rebounds, while Chris Paul finished with 34 points and 16 assists.

Portland clung to a 114-112 lead with 13.4 seconds left and padded it with Wesley Matthews' foul shots. Paul missed a 3-point attempt as time ran out. □



Thunder's Westbrook out until after All-Star break

STEVE REED

AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina (AP) — Oklahoma City Thunder guard Russell Westbrook has undergone

arthroscopic knee surgery and won't return until after the All-Star break.

General manager Sam Presti says in a statement

Friday that Westbrook has been playing pain free, but "recently had experienced increased swelling" in his right knee.

Presti says the team consulted with a surgeon in Los Angeles and an MRI determined there was "an area of concern that had not

previously existed."

Presti says "We know that Russell's work ethic and commitment will help him return to the level of play that we have all come to appreciate."

The Thunder visit the Charlotte Bobcats on Friday night. □

Oklahoma City Thunder guard Russell Westbrook looks to pass during the second half of Thunder's NBA basketball game against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2013, in New York. The Thunder won 123-94.

Associated Press

Roger Federer hires 'hero' Stefan Edberg as coach

The Associated Press
Roger Federer is adding Stefan Edberg to his team, part of a recent trend of top tennis players hiring ex-stars as coaches. Federer, owner of a record 17 Grand Slam titles, says on Friday on Facebook that six-time major champion Edberg "agreed to work with us for at least 10 weeks starting at the Australian Open." Federer refers to Edberg as his "childhood hero." Sev-

erin Luthi will continue to work with Federer, too. In October, Federer split with coach Paul Annacone after 3½ seasons together. Federer finished 2013 ranked No. 6. It's the first season since 2002 he didn't reach a major final. The Federer-Edberg announcement comes a little more than a week after Novak Djokovic hired Boris Becker as a coach. Andy Murray already had been working with Ivan Lendl. □

Venus Williams feeling fit, healthy for new season

AUCKLAND, New Zealand (AP) — Venus Williams says she's as fit and healthy as she has been in years and hopes to turn a dream into reality when she starts her season at the Auckland WTA tournament from Monday. The seven-time grand slam winner arrived in Auckland from Los Angeles on Friday and said her aim was to reach the Auckland final. Williams said "the other day I dreamed I had a win and I woke up and realized

I hadn't even played a round. I hope to go round by round and at least get to the finals — that would be awesome." The 33-year-old, who won her last final in Luxembourg in October 2012, said she had been working hard during the offseason. "I feel like I'm coming into the season as fit and healthy as I have in many years, so for me that's exciting and I have a positive outlook. My goal is to be like Serena Williams!" □

Nadal loses to Ferrer in Mubadala Championship



David Ferrer of Spain, left, and his fellow countryman Rafael Nadal of Spain leave the court after their match during the second day of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Friday Dec. 27, 2013.

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Novak Djokovic overcame Jo-Wilfried Tsonga to enter the final of the Mubadala Championship for the third time in three years on Friday, but he won't be facing top-ranked Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic beat Tsonga 7-6 (5), 6-3 in 74 minutes to set up a repeat of last year's final against David Ferrer, who knocked out Spanish compatriot Nadal 6-4, 6-4 with breaks in the last game of each set, in 90 minutes of quality tennis. Djokovic was watched by

his new part-time coach Boris Becker at the exhibition event. Earlier, Wimbledon champion Andy Murray won his first match following a three-month layoff for a back injury when he beat Stanislas Wawrinka 6-3, 6-4 in the playoff for fifth. □

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'Boomerang buyers' may boost housing

Kimberly Miller

© 2013 Cox Newspapers

JUPITER, Fla. — South Florida housing experts are trumpeting changes that allow foreclosure sufferers to buy back into the American Dream sooner than they probably imagined, calling 2014 the year of the "boomerang buyer."

Revisions made over the summer to Federal Housing Administration guidelines and technical updates in November to Fannie Mae loan approval systems have opened the door for some former homeowners to buy again just one year after foreclosure.

Founders of the San Diego-

Foreclosure.com, said the boomerang buyers are necessary to maintain a growing economy as other drivers fade.

Investors, who bolstered home sales during the real estate recovery, will reduce purchases as prices climb. Recent college graduates with student debt may not have the means to buy. And underwater homeowners are still stuck in a holding pattern -- unable to sell so they can move up and buy anew.

"People who are primed to buy are the ones who qualify on all levels but had a short sale or foreclosure on their record," Maddux

but an automatic underwriting system couldn't differentiate a short sale from a foreclosure and would spit out a denial. The application could then be referred for a manual review. But those were often denied based on the computer's refusal, Maddux said.

Eligibility for a loan fast-track hinges on whether borrowers suffered a specific financial event during the recession that, through no fault of their own, caused them to lose their home. Also, the foreclosure or short sale should be the only blemish on a credit report. For an FHA mortgage, the homebuyer must take



A home is advertised for sale in Matthews, N.C. South Florida housing experts are trumpeting changes that allow foreclosure sufferers to buy back into the American Dream sooner than they probably imagined, calling 2014 the year of the "boomerang buyer."

(AP Photo/Chuck Burton)

based company After-Foreclosure.com said last week millions of banned borrowers nationwide will be eligible for a mortgage next year, while Jupiter mortgage broker Skip McDonough said his firm is already doing deals with homebuyers who were forced into default during the housing bust.

"The old-fashioned way of doing it was a seven-year waiting period," said McDonough, president of Family Mortgage. "That's changed, and people who don't believe they can qualify are qualifying."

McDonough and Jon Maddux, co-founder of After-

said. "The refinance boom is over and lenders are looking for a way to capture more business."

Under the Federal Housing Administration's "Back to Work" program, it will approve certain borrowers for a home loan just one year after a foreclosure, short sale, deed in lieu of foreclosure or bankruptcy. FHA's previous timeline was three years for a short sale and foreclosure and two years for a bankruptcy.

Federal mortgage backer Fannie Mae has previously allowed homebuyers who completed a short sale to buy again after two years if they put 10 percent down,

a housing counseling class. People who walked away simply because their house was underwater likely won't qualify. Michael Kodsi, chief executive officer of Choice Mortgage Bank in Boca Raton, Fla., said he's had three inquiries in the last week from boomerang buyers. "They've been taught a lesson. They want their house payment to be affordable," Kodsi said. "The people I've dealt with are more excited than ever to own their own home and are sick of renting."

But there is a reality check. People who can get a loan may not always be able to find a house. □

US stocks end day mostly sideways in quiet trading

KEN SWEET

AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street's six-day rally stalled out on Friday as stocks ended the day mostly flat in quiet trading.

Bond yields continued to rise. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note climbed above the 3 percent mark. The yield hasn't consistently traded above that level since July 2011.

The increase will translate into higher interest rates on mortgages and other kinds of loans.

Energy stocks were among the biggest gainers after oil prices climbed above \$100 a barrel for the first time since Octo-



ber. Offshore oil drilling companies Transocean and Diamond Offshore each rose about 1.5 percent. Oil giant ExxonMobil climbed 1 percent.

Sprint jumped 83 cents, or 8 percent, to \$10.79 following news reports that Japan's Softbank, which owns Sprint, may use the company as a vehicle to purchase wireless competitor T-Mobile.

Most of Wall Street remains on vacation. Trading volume has been very low this week. Only 2 billion shares changed hands on the New York Stock Exchange on Friday, about 40 percent below the recent average. There were no major economic reports or corporate earnings Friday.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 1.47 points, or 0.01 percent, to 16,478.41.

The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.62 point, or 0.03 percent, to 1,841.40 and the Nasdaq composite was down 10.59 points, or 0.3 percent, at 4,156.59.

Even with Friday's pause, the stock market has been in rally mode heading into the end of the year. The Dow and S&P 500 are up 2.4 percent and 2 percent respectively so far in December, with only two trading days left in the year.

For 2013, the S&P 500 is up roughly 29 percent, its best year since 1997, and the Dow is up 25.8 percent, its best year since 1996.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 3 percent from 2.99 percent Thursday. Bond yields have steadily climbed since Dec. 18, when the Federal Reserve announced it was paring back its bond-buying program.

The purchases were aimed at keeping long-term interest rates low to encourage borrowing and hiring. "Interest rates are on a road back to normalcy after being artificially suppressed by the Fed," said Karyn Cavanaugh, market strategist with ING U.S. Investment Management.

Cavanaugh said she expects the yield on the 10-year note to rise to about 3.5 percent by the end of 2014.

In corporate news:

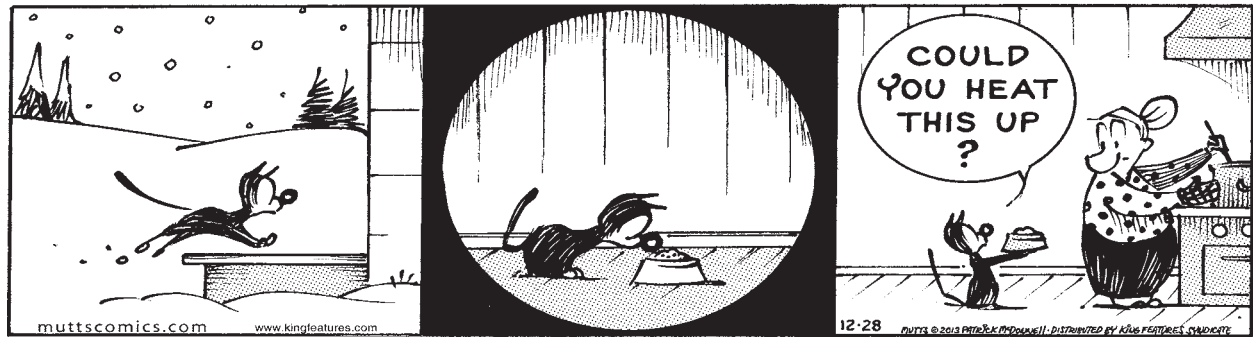
General Motors was also among the bigger movers Friday, falling 58 cents, or 1 percent, to \$40.94. The automotive giant said it would have to recall 1.5 million cars in China to replace a bracket that secures a fuel pump.

Twitter fell \$9.56, or 13 percent, to \$63.75. Twitter has soared in recent days, prompting one Wall Street analyst to downgrade the company's stock to the equivalent of "sell," saying the rally was overdone.

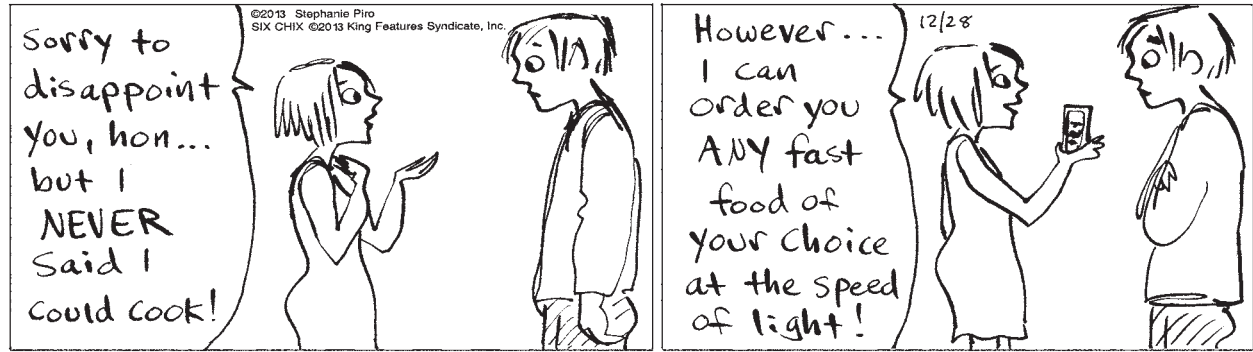
Even with Friday's sell-off, the social media company's stock is still up 53 percent this month. □

"The big debate among my team is whether international markets will play catch-up next year," said Madigan of JPMorgan Private Bank. □

Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

			2					
		8					1	
	2		5	6			7	
1		6			3			
		4				5		
			4			2		7
	6			8	7		2	
		3				9		
					4			

Difficulty Level ★★★★★
12/28

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

1	2	6	4	7	8	3	5	9
5	4	9	1	2	3	7	8	6
3	7	8	9	5	6	4	1	2
6	5	3	8	1	2	9	4	7
7	8	1	6	9	4	2	3	5
2	9	4	7	3	5	1	6	8
4	3	5	2	8	9	6	7	1
8	1	2	3	6	7	5	9	4
9	6	7	5	4	1	8	2	3

ACROSS

- 1 Bobby __; hair fastener
4 Synagogue leader
9 Doing nothing
13 Still in the sack
15 Actress Burstyn
16 Cruel
17 __ as an owl
18 Rest on the water's surface
19 Musical group
20 Oscar or Emmy
22 Peeves
23 Declare untrue
24 Curved bone
26 Butter or jam
29 __ of justice; unfair outcome
34 Jail, slangily
35 Actor __ Willis
36 Peg for Palmer
37 Dobbin's dinner
38 Browned bread
39 Daddy
40 In __ ear and out the other
41 Sum deducted
42 Cavalry sword
43 Most bothersome
45 Diminish
46 Holiday __; traveler's stop
47 Punches
48 Grouch
51 Aide
56 Writer Victor __
57 Merchandise
58 Math class for some; abbr.
60 Takes advantage of
61 __ Lauder cosmetics
62 Thus
63 Fit snugly together
64 Cheers
65 "Brylcreem, a little __'ll do ya"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13			14		15				16		
17				18					19		
	20			21					22		
			23				24	25			
26	27	28				29	30		31	32	33
34				35					36		
37				38					39		
40				41					42		
43			44				45				
		46				47					
48	49	50		51	52	53			54	55	
56				57					58		59
60				61					62		
63				64					65		

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/28/13

Friday's Puzzle Solved

BRACE	TWAS	HARP
ROTOR	OATH	OHIO
AMOUR	TREE	MANS
DEPRAVED	AVERSE	
STEM	CROWDED	
TAKEIN	GUSTO	
ONE	COVER	ERECT
DEER	MINES	KALE
OWNER	PESTS	RUE
POPE	APPLES	
OCTOBER	HIRE	
THIRST	FIDELITY	
HINT	EPIC	ALOHA
EDGE	RISK	DETER
REED	SETS	STAND

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12/28/13

- 4 Return of the buyer's cost
5 Backstreet
6 Ink stain
7 Pulsate
8 Do things together
9 Drink
10 Precious
11 Thin; slender
12 Finishes
14 Makes numb
21 Yellowish wood
25 TV's "Got a Secret"
26 Ice cream server's spoon
27 Glider or 747
28 Ceremonies
29 Characteristic
30 Fall color
31 Pierces
32 Portable home
33 Pine; long
35 Hope & Barker
38 Adolescent
39 Northwest __; seaway joining the Atlantic and the Pacific
41 Racket
42 Aug.'s follower
44 Put the __ on; nix
45 Defeats
47 Bathroom feature in Europe
48 Pal
49 Trick
50 Eras
52 Unexceptional
53 Explorer
Hernando de
54 Bookish fellow
55 Forum garment
59 Unruly crowd

Film Review: 'Justin Bieber's Believe'

JON CARAMANICA
© 2013 New York Times

The key moment in "Justin Bieber's Believe," the new hagiographical film, comes in the second half, in a segment that touches ever so lightly upon Bieber's tumultuous public image over the last year. The scene is London, in March: A small cluster of paparazzi is egging Bieber on, and he takes the bait, jumping at the photographers and being held back by a bodyguard. At least half of the conversation (on both sides) is bleeped.

"I happened to snap," Bieber says of the incident and his confrontation with one participant. "I wanted to hit him." Depending on how you get your news about Bieber, this is either a sanitized version of very public events or a jolt of reality intruding into Bieber's unsullied dreamboat narrative. That scene alone doesn't save this film from being another piece of propaganda for the Bieber proletariat, but it is, at the very least, an acknowledgment that the days of pure fluff are over. Going forward, understanding Bieber - at 19, already a veteran pop star - requires seeing him as both an idol and a target, a child and a man. That said, films like this work best when exalting is the task, and when it comes to displaying Bieber in his milieu - onstage - it shines. The footage is arresting and crisp, and Bieber is in his element: He's not the most outgoing pop star, but he has the requisite attitude, and his mild cool comes through clearly.

But that is the bulk of what "Believe" has to say about its subject. We see far more of Bieber onstage than in an interview chair, and the interview is conducted by Jon M. Chu, the film's director, who keeps the conversation light, apart from noting to Bieber that he is "the perfect candidate to become a train wreck," a suggestion that is quickly parried.

"Believe" lacks the genuine emotional swells of 2011's "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never," except for one section in which Bieber talks

about Avalanna Routh, a fan who had had a rare form of cancer since she was 18 months old and who died last year at the age of 6. "I miss her, Bro," he says, tears falling down his cheeks. Fans in the theater at the screening I caught - the film was not screened for critics - were crying here, too. And, in the movie, it's fans who do most of the emotional heavy lifting, as seen in home videos and earnest YouTube clips, and in the crowd at his show, screaming unreservedly. One scene is filmed from inside his car, a swarm of girls flooding every window; it's intense and frightening.

On Christmas Eve, the day before the film's release, Bieber took to Twitter with a message: "My beloved believers I'm officially retiring." (Anyone want to bet on that? Even Bieber appeared to back off a little bit later.) At best, it was a cynical ploy to gin up interest in the film. At worst, it was a cry for help. If it's that, then the secondary interviews with Bieber's intimates, all of which have just a touch of black cloud hovering overhead, are extra resonant. Scooter Braun, Bieber's manager, describes this star's journey as "a constant search for validation." Usher speaks of Bieber's fans as his "moral compass." And the producer Rodney Jerkins, while praising Bieber's abilities, acknowledges that he has experienced only victory thus far: "He doesn't really understand what the loss looks like."

But he's starting to - imagine what that movie would look like, if anyone were brave enough to make it.

'JUSTIN BIEBER'S BELIEVE'

Directed by Jon M. Chu; director of photography, Karsten Gopinath; edited by Avi Youabian and Jillian Moul; music by Nathan Lanier; produced by Justin Bieber, Scooter Braun, Bill O'Dowd, Usher Raymond IV and Garrett Grant; released by Open Road Films. Running time: 1 hour, 32 minutes. Rated PG (parental guidance suggested) for excessive pop star polish. □

Classifieds

RED/RE-SALE

Marriott Surf Club
2 bedr, 2 bath \$450K
wk 51 \$37K wk 52 \$41K
O.V. wk 51 \$39K wk 52 \$44K
O.S. wk 51 \$55K wk 52 \$46K
O.F. wk 51 \$55K wk 52 \$60K
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

201053

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Amsterdam Manor
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Rescue of icebound Antarctic ship faces setback

KRISTEN GELINEAU

Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — A Chinese icebreaker that was en route to rescue a ship trapped in Antarctic ice was forced to turn back on Saturday after being unable to push its way through the heavy sea ice. The Snow Dragon icebreaker came within 7 miles (11 kilometers) of the Russian ship MV Akademik Shokalskiy, which has been stuck since Christmas Eve, but had to retreat after the ice became too thick, said expedition spokesman Alvin Stone.

The Akademik Shokalskiy, which has been on a research expedition to Antarctica, got stuck Tuesday after a blizzard's whipping winds pushed the sea ice around the ship, freezing it in place. The ship wasn't in danger of sinking, and there are weeks worth of supplies for the 74 scientists, tourists and crew on board, but the vessel cannot move.

Three icebreakers, including the Snow Dragon, have been trying to reach the ship since Wednesday. France's L'Astrolabe has also made it to the edge of the sea ice surrounding the ship, but will wait there with the Snow Dragon for the arrival of Australia's Aurora Australis, which has the best chance of breaking through the thick ice, Stone said. The Australian vessel is not expected to reach the area until Sunday.

"I think we're probably looking at another 24 hours of twiddling our fingers and waiting for something to happen," Stone said.

The scientific team on board the research ship



In this image provided by Australasian Antarctic Expedition/Footloose Photography the Russian ship MV Akademik Shokalskiy is trapped in thick Antarctic ice 1,500 nautical miles south of Hobart, Australia, Friday, Dec. 27, 2013.

Associated Press

— which left New Zealand on Nov. 28 — had been recreating Australian explorer Douglas Mawson's century-old voyage to Antarctica when it became trapped.

They plan to continue their expedition after they are freed, expedition leader Chris Turney said.

Passengers and crew initially had to contend with blizzard conditions, including winds up to 70 kilometers per hour (40 miles per hour), but the weather has calmed considerably since then, Turney said.

Despite the interruption to the expedition, the scientists have continued their research while stuck, counting birds in the area

and drilling through the ice surrounding the ship to photograph sea life. Those on board also managed to celebrate the holiday

with a traditional Christmas feast and a "Secret Santa" gift exchange, which helped keep everyone's spirits high, Turney said.

China building fourth .Antarctic research base

BEIJING (AP) — Growing scientific power China has begun constructing its fourth Antarctic research base to enhance studies into climate change and other fields, state media reported Thursday.

Taishan Station is being built about 500 kilometers (310 miles) inland,

the China Daily newspaper and other media said. It is to house as many as 20 people during the Antarctic summer from December to March and be unstaffed the rest of the year.

The base is a further sign of China's lofty scientific am-

bitions following the soft landing of a rover on the moon earlier this month. China also boasts the world's fastest supercomputer and is investing heavily in deep-sea exploration.

China currently operates two coastal bases year-round in Antarctica staffed by as many as 140 people during the summer, along with a high-altitude inland base that closes during the winter.

Great Wall Station, China's first, opened in 1985, more than 80 years after Argentina inaugurated the first

continually staffed base. In 1983, China acceded to the Antarctic Treaty that guarantees freedom of scientific investigation and bans military activity on the continent.

The reports said workers constructing Taishan Station flew to the site by helicopter

Wednesday from the icebreaker Xuelong, which is carrying 256 personnel, including two Thai scientists. The mission is China's 30th to the Antarctic and will also survey possible sites for the construction of a future fifth Antarctic base.

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Hollywood poised for best-ever box-office year

JESSICA HERNDON

AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Despite a string of summer-time flops, Hollywood is expected to have a banner year at the domestic box office, coming in just shy of \$11 billion, the largest annual take ever. But because of higher ticket prices, actual attendance at North American theaters remained flat after a decade of decline.

With the current domestic box-office tally nearly 1 percent ahead of last year at this time, 2013 could surpass 2012's overall haul of \$10.8 billion by more than \$100 million, according to box-office tracker Rentrak. High-profile flops such as "The Lone Ranger," "After Earth," "R.I.P.D." and "Turbo" were offset by mega-hits like "Fast & Furious 6" and "Iron Man 3," which consistently filled theaters last summer. More recently, Warner Bros.' space epic "Gravity" has earned \$254 million domestically, Lionsgate's sci-fi sequel "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" has grossed \$378 million and fantasy prequel "The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug" has brought in \$150 million for Warner Bros. A strong holiday slate is also boosting the year's box-office total. "There has virtually been every kind of genre of film available," said Rentrak box-office analyst Paul Dergarabedian. "You have blockbusters like 'Hobbit' and esoteric, challenging films like 'Nebraska,' 'Dallas Buyers Club' and 'Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom.' All of these films get people to the movies." But the National Association of Theater Owners projects that the actual number of tickets sold domestically in 2013 will remain about the same as last year's 1.36 billion. That's down from the all-time high of 1.57 billion admissions in 2002.

In 2011, the domestic box-office gross sunk to a 16-year low, dropping 3.5 percent from 2010 to \$10.2 billion. But 2012 saw the industry rebound with a \$10.8 billion total, thanks to hits like Disney's "The Avengers"

and Warner Bros.' Batman finale "The Dark Knight Rises."

Both films screened in 3-D, a profit-boosting perk that saw a huge increase in popularity following 2009's "Avatar." But the public's appetite for the heightened technology has eased, leaving Hollywood to search for other ways to counter audience drain.

Entertainment available on countless portable devices continues to threaten multiplex attendance, as do advanced home theater systems and video-on-demand services offering original premium programming and feature films the same day as their theatrical release. But Hollywood is fighting back with the premium multiplex experience. Movie attendance may be tepid, but the audience is willing to pay more for theater extras, which keep the bottom line growing, even as admissions remain flat. "Theaters are offering IMAX, bigger chairs, dine-in options and alcohol," said Don Harris, head of distribution at Paramount. "It's kind of like the difference between staying at a Hilton or a Ritz Carlton. I think what you saw this year was a growth in a segment of the audience that isn't as worried about the price of a movie ticket as they are interested in the out-of-home premium experience. I think you're going to see that going forward." And with all of the bells and whistles now offered at theaters, movie-going is still one of the least expensive ways to be entertained, compared to concerts, sporting events and live theater," notes Richie Fay, Lionsgate's president of domestic distribution. (So far this year, the average cost of a movie ticket in North America has been \$8.05, according to NATO.) Social media has also helped boost sales, Fay observed, with Twitter and other services providing a powerful marketing tool for studios and a faster way for fans to spread that all-important word of mouth. □



This image released by Lionsgate shows, from left, Josh Hutcherson as Peeta Mellark, Elizabeth Banks as Effie Trinket and Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in a scene from the film, "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire."

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Action star Jet Li treated for overactive thyroid

HONG KONG (AP) — Jet Li says he's being treated for an overactive thyroid, but he's determined to fight the condition head-on. The Chinese action star known for his kung fu skills discussed his diagnosis during the taping of a talent show he's judging in China. In Tuesday's taping, the 50-year-old Li appeared to have a fuller face and heavier frame. He said his weight has fluctuated but he's taking it all in stride. Li joked about his weight gain and said "I'm fat, I don't have the time to lose it. It's a fact!" He explained that exercise is not advised with the medication he's taking. An overactive thyroid, or hyperthyroidism, causes changes in a person's metabolism and heart rate, among other symptoms, but is generally treatable with medications. Li was diagnosed in 2010. He kept his condition under

control with medication, but it came back with a vengeance recently. He said that he's tackling his illness head-on. "I'm just a regular guy, I'm not Wong Fei Hung, I'm not Huo Yuan Jia (kung fu heroes he portrays on film), I'm not a hero. I'm just like you." A martial arts champion at a young age, Li turned to acting and began showing off his kung fu skills on big screens in the 1980s. He catapulted to fame in the '90s with the "Once Upon a Time in China" films where he portrayed martial arts master Wong Fei Hung. His Hollywood career includes such titles as "Lethal Weapon 4," "Romeo Must Die" and more recently "The Expendables 2." Li confessed there are times he's unsure if he's able to carry on with work, but he's determined. "I'm in pain, but I'm not suffering. I'm happy," he said. □



In this Monday, Aug. 23, 2010 file photo, Chinese actor Jet Li smiles during a press event for announcing his new movie "Ocean Heaven," in Taipei, Taiwan. Li said he's being treated for an overactive thyroid, but he's determined to fight the condition head-on.

Associated Press

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The Fear Economy



PAUL KRUGMAN
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More than 1 million unemployed Americans are about to get the cruellest of Christmas "gifts." They're about to have their unemployment benefits cut off. You see, Republicans in Congress insist that if you haven't found a job after months of searching, it must be because you aren't trying hard enough. So you need an extra incentive in the form of sheer desperation.

As a result, the plight of the unemployed, already terrible, is about to get even worse. Obviously those who have jobs are much better off. Yet the continuing weakness of the labor market takes a toll on them, too. So let's talk a bit about the plight of the employed.

Some people would have you believe that employment relations are just like any other market transaction; workers have something to sell, employers want to buy what they offer, and they simply make a deal. But anyone who has ever held a job in the real world - or, for that matter, seen a Dilbert cartoon - knows that it's not like that.

The fact is that employment generally involves a power relationship: You have a boss, who tells you what to do, and if you refuse, you may be fired. This doesn't have to be a bad thing. If employers value their workers, they won't make unreasonable demands. But it's not a simple transaction. There's a country music classic titled "Take This Job and Shove It." There isn't and won't be a song titled "Take This Consumer Durable and Shove It."

So employment is a power relationship, and high unemployment has greatly weakened workers' already weak position in that relationship.

We can actually quantify that weakness by looking at the quits rate - the percentage of workers voluntarily leaving their jobs (as opposed to being fired) each month. Obviously, there are many reasons a worker might want to leave his or her job. Quitting is, however, a risk; unless a worker already has a new job lined up, he or she doesn't know how long it will take to find a new job and how that job will compare with the old one.

And the risk of quitting is much greater when unemployment is high and there are many more people seeking jobs than there are job openings. As a result, you would expect to see the quits

rate rise during booms, fall during slumps - and, indeed, it does. Quits plunged during the 2007-9 recession, and they have only partially rebounded, reflecting the weakness and inadequacy of our economic recovery.

Now think about what this means for workers' bargaining power. When the economy is strong, workers are empowered. They can leave if they're unhappy with the way they're being treated and know that they can quickly find a new job if they are let go. When the economy is weak, however, workers have a very weak hand, and employers are in a position to work them harder, pay them less, or both.

Is there any evidence that this is happening? And how. The economic recovery has, as I said, been weak and inadequate, but all the burden of that weakness is being borne by workers. Corporate profits plunged during the financial crisis but quickly bounced back, and they continued to soar. Indeed, at this point, after-tax profits are more than 60 percent higher than they were in 2007, before the recession began. We don't know how much of this profit surge can be explained by the fear factor - the ability to squeeze workers who know that they have no place to go. But it must be at least part of the explanation. In fact, it's possible (although by no means certain) that corporate interests are actually doing better in a somewhat depressed economy than they would if we had full employment.

What's more, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to suggest that this reality helps explain why our political system has turned its backs on the unemployed. No, I don't believe that there's a secret cabal of CEOs plotting to keep the economy weak. But I do think that a major reason why reducing unemployment isn't a political priority is that the economy may be lousy for workers, but corporate America is doing just fine.

And once you understand this, you also understand why it's so important to change those priorities.

There's been a somewhat strange debate among progressives lately, with some arguing that populism and condemnations of inequality are a diversion, that full employment should instead be the top priority. As some leading progressive economists have pointed out, however, full employment is itself a populist issue: Weak labor markets are a main reason workers are losing ground, and the excessive power of corporations and the wealthy is a main reason we aren't doing anything about jobs.

Too many Americans live in a climate of economic fear. There are many steps that we can take to end that state of affairs, but the most important is to put jobs back on the agenda. □



The Gospel According To Mary



JOE NOCERA
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One Sunday morning a few weeks ago, Hal Taussig, co-pastor of the Chestnut Hill United Church in Philadelphia, chose one of his favorite bits of scripture to build his sermon upon. It's called The Thanksgiving Prayer, and the portion of it that Taussig chose goes like this:

"O light of life we have known you/
O womb of all that grows we have known you/
O womb pregnant with the nature of the Father we have known you/
O never-ending endurance of the Father who gives birth, so we worship your goodness."

If you are thinking that you've never come across such a prayer in the New Testament, you're right, of course. The prayer was part of a treasure trove of early Christian documents, written in Coptic, discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. The Nag Hammadi find was, in turn, among the 75-plus early Christian documents that have been unearthed over the last century and a half. Collectively, these works were once known as The Gnostic Gospels, and they were viewed by many theologians as the work of early Christian heretics, as their interpretation of the life of Jesus was often quite different than the one recounted in the four gospels of the New Testament.

In addition to his responsibilities at the church in Philadelphia, however, Taussig is a professor of biblical literature at Union Theological Seminary in New York. One of his areas of expertise is those early Christian texts that are not part of the New Testament. Along with Karen King of Harvard Divinity School and others, he has championed the idea that the Gnostic Gospels were not necessarily heretical but were rather were an example of the diversity of thought and ideas that Christians were grappling with in the first and second centuries. Many of the academics who study these texts no longer use the term "gnostic" because of its connotation of heresy.

What's more, Taussig believes that many of these texts are, in their own way, scriptural, as worthy of meditation and prayer as the texts in the 27 books of the New Testament. He often preaches from the early Christian texts. And in February 2012, he and a group of nationally known spiritual leaders and scholars got together in New Orleans to conduct an interesting exercise: to choose texts that might integrate well with the New Testament itself. They chose 10 of them, and the results were published in a book titled "A New New Testament." This year, the book landed on my desk, which is how I stumbled across Taussig and his work.

Those early Christian texts can seem quite astonishing. Several of them are told from the point of view of a woman, something that is not true of any of the New Testament. The Gospel of Mary, for instance, tells the story of Mary Magdalene, "who is portrayed as one of Jesus's closest associates," as Taussig writes in an introduction to that gospel, and has been given teachings from Jesus that she passes on to his male

disciples. A second book that is written mostly in the female voice is "The Thunder: Perfect Mind." A poetic work, what is particularly amazing about it is that the female voice is that of the deity Herself.

Another book, The Gospel of Thomas, has no narrative at all; it is, instead, a collection of 114 of Jesus' sayings, some of which are familiar and many of which are not. In "A New New Testament," Taussig and the other spiritual leaders decided to place it in front of the four traditional gospels because, as Taussig writes, "it is a near perfect example of how these additional books offer both ... strong connections to the traditional New Testament and eye-popping new content not previously known."

One point Taussig and other academics make is that we really have no idea why certain books are in The New Testament and others are not. "The making of the New Testament took 500 years," Taussig told me, who also notes that we have no idea, in fact, who wrote many of the books that make up the New Testament - or the early Christian texts. What is almost surely true is that they were not written by Luke or Mark - or Mary Magdalene, for that matter. Even the earliest of them was written decades, if not centuries, after Jesus' life. The matter of heresy came centuries later as well.

In his sermon about The Thanksgiving Prayer, Taussig used it to offer a meditation on the difficulties of both societal and personal growth. "There is a womb pregnant with divinity itself," he said as he neared the end of his sermon, "making us ready for taking that next step forward, in the relationship that is hurting, the psyche that doesn't know what to do, and the society that needs help." Scripture indeed.

Merry Christmas. □

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